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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN NIGERIA HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE MAY TO AUG  
2005

REF: LAGOS 661

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

1. (U) This is a roundup of various recent incidents representative of the human rights situation in southern Nigeria. This summary is organized according to the sections of the annual Human Rights Report. These incidents have not been reported in other cables, or they are updates of previously reported items.

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Section 1 - Respect for the Integrity of the Person  
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2. (U) On June 5, six policemen gunned down two youths in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in front of their home. The driver of the youths' vehicle was detained incommunicado for seventeen days. Authorities initially claimed the two youths were a pair of known armed robbers. After investigations revealed that it was a case of mistaken identity, police attempted to cover the mistake by framing the youths for an actual armed robbery. The youths' father has lodged an appeal with the Inspector General's office. (Comment: As can be seen from the present report, policemen often resort to the canard of having encountered armed robbers when questioned about possible improper shootings or incarcerations. Sometimes, the pretext is so flimsy that it causes a popular uproar, as happened recently in the Apo district of Abuja, where police shot six civilians at a checkpoint, then claimed the victims were armed robbers, prompting public outrage and a presidential investigation. End Comment.)

3. (U) On July 15, unknown gunmen murdered PDP politician Alhaji Lateef Olaniyan, in Ibadan, Oyo State. Olaniyan was killed after a meeting with prominent Ibadan politician and PDP powerbroker Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu. Adedibu has been in a contentious political battle with Governor Ladoja. Sensing a political opportunity, Adedibu was quick to implicate the governor in the murder. Governor Ladoja has refuted Adedibu's claim. This incident will further worsen the relationship between Adedibu and Ladoja, and may result in additional political violence.

4. (U) In late July, Human Rights Watch submitted a report cataloguing serious human rights abuses committed by Nigerian police. In mid-July UN officials had also condemned similar incidents of abuse in Nigeria. Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, cited a recent case in Enugu where six persons incarcerated for "armed robbery" were killed by police in their cells. Authorities claimed the prisoners were attempting to escape.

5. (U) On July 26, a naval officer fatally shot the owner of a motorcycle taxi, known locally as an "okada." The shooting took place after what observers termed a "minor accident," and a brief altercation. Seeing the incident as a manifestation of the haughtiness of those in military uniform, incensed bystanders began to riot until police forces intervened. Media sources reported an "unconfirmed" number of injuries but no casualties.

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Section 2 - Respect for Civil Liberties  
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6. (U) On May 2, soldiers and street toughs, popularly known as "area boys," clashed in Lagos. The incident followed the killing of a soldier near a military command in the Ikeja suburb of Lagos. Soldiers alleged some area boys killed the soldier when he prevented them from collecting illegal tolls from commercial vehicle operators. During the ensuing melee, six soldiers were seriously injured while several vehicles were set ablaze. Soldiers arrested 62 suspected area boys, handing them to the police for prosecution. On June 15, the GON ordered all soldiers back to their barracks, apparently

to forestall future clashes between the soldiers and area boys.

17. (U) On July 11, the 53 Lagos State Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) members mentioned in reftel were absolved of two out of three treason charges. Around the same time, the Federal High Court in Kaduna granted bail to 17 members of the MASSOB, who had been held by authorities since April without a bail hearing or trial.

18. (U) On August 6, thirty-two people held in Enugu by the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante law enforcement group, died. The group subsequently abandoned some 62 other detainees and fled. The people were seized as "armed robbers" and kept in a windowless, poorly ventilated shop for days. Riots erupted when the dead bodies were discovered by police.

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Section 3 - Respect for Political Rights: Citizens' Right to Change Their Government  
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19. (U) On May 16, gunmen attacked two key Alliance for Democracy (AD) figures in Osun State. The gunmen killed a top AD financier, Alhaji Alabi Olajoku, and abducted and later released the majority leader of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Jide Omoworare. The two leaders were returning to Lagos after attending a political rally for the AD Osun State gubernatorial nomination of Chieftain Raufu Aregbesola. Aregbesola, Lagos State Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, alleged the attack was politically motivated, specifically accusing Osun State's ruling Peoples Democratic Party Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola of involvement. However, the Osun State police commissioner told journalists the initial investigation suggested a robbery attack. An AD member who witnessed the incident similarly reported it looked more like a robbery than an assassination plot.

110. (U) On July 19, political supporters of Senator Ibikunle Amosun's gubernatorial bid clashed with Governor Olugbenga Daniel's security forces in the Ogun State capital, Abeokuta. The governor's security detail responded with tear gas and, according to some witnesses, the governor's detail fired shots into the crowd. Senator Amosun was later suspended from political activity for one month by his party, the PDP.

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Section 5 - Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons  
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111. (U) Speaking at the launch of a new report, "Nigeria: Unheard Voices - Violence Against Women in the Family," on May 31, Stephane Mikala, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme, estimated in certain communities of Lagos State, up to two-thirds of women have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence in the family. Mikala further stated that husbands, partners, and fathers are responsible for most violence perpetrated against women. Culture places a stigma on the victim rather than the perpetrator. Itoro Eze-Anaba of the Legal Defense and Assistance Project (LEDAP), a contributor to the report, added that discriminatory laws exacerbate the problem. For example, the penalty for indecent assault on a man is more severe than the penalty for the same offense against a woman.

112. (U) On July 26, a member of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly, Ms. Dorothy Obasi, announced that her state would enact a law to prosecute traffickers as well as parents complicit in this illicit trade. Ebonyi State has among the highest incidence of child trafficking.

113. (U) On August 2, the spokeswoman for Women's Consortium for Nigeria (WO-CON) stated over 15 million children are engaged in child labor in the country, many of them in Ogun State. (Comment: This number is pulled from a 2000/2001 study conducted by the Federal Bureau of Statistics.) WO-CON executive director Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi said Nigeria, and Ogun State in particular, are strategic locations for traffickers engaged in sourcing, transit, receipt, and export of human beings, particularly women and children. Olateru-Olagbegi was speaking in Abeokuta at the opening of a human trafficking sensitization program organized by WO-CON with assistance from the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund.

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Section 6 - Worker Rights  
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114. (U) On July 10, Nigerian Ports Authority workers disrupted a meeting of the Bureau of Public Enterprises at the Apapa port in Lagos. Several people were reportedly wounded by police who intervened to bring the situation under control.

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Comment

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15. (C) Comment: While incidents involving key political figures receive most of the local headlines and perhaps even attract some international attention, the real human rights challenge is that average Nigerians are deeply concerned whenever they come into contact with law enforcement personnel. One's life can change if you happen to encounter the wrong policeman, manning the wrong checkpoint, at the wrong time. A person can be detained, beaten, or worse. Since the days of military rule the pervasive attitude among law enforcement officers is that their jobs require them to keep the population in check and to augment their salaries by extracting money from the population. This has and will continue to lead to unnecessary and oft tragic abuses until there is systematic change in the law enforcement mindset.  
End comment.  
BROWNE